The Unseen Battlefield: Xi Jinping's Power Struggle and the Future of China

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Introduction

Recent events within the highest echelons of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) suggest a significant and ongoing power struggle is unfolding under the leadership of President Xi Jinping. Since securing a historic third term, Xi has initiated a series of purges and political maneuvers that have been interpreted by international observers as a concerted effort to consolidate his authority, eliminate potential rivals, and ensure absolute loyalty. This report provides a comprehensive analysis of the current power struggle, drawing on a wide range of media reports, academic analyses, and official statements. It examines the key dimensions of this struggle, including an unprecedented anti-corruption campaign targeting the military, the abrupt removal of high-profile ministers, deep-seated disagreements over economic policy, and the international implications of this internal turmoil.

The Purge of the People's Liberation Army

One of the most dramatic manifestations of the power struggle is the sweeping purge of the People's Liberation Army (PLA). This campaign, conducted under the banner of anti-corruption, has been described as the most significant military shakeup since the era of Mao Zedong. According to a Bloomberg analysis, Xi Jinping has ousted nearly one-fifth of the generals he personally appointed, a move unprecedented by his predecessors, Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao [1]. The purge has been particularly focused on the PLA Rocket Force, which controls China's nuclear arsenal, and the Equipment Development Department, responsible for procuring new weaponry.

U.S. intelligence reports suggest the purge was triggered by the discovery of widespread corruption that has severely undermined China's military modernization efforts. Allegations include missiles filled with water instead of fuel and missile silo lids that are unable to function properly, calling into question the PLA's actual combat readiness [2]. The sheer scale of the purge, which has seen the removal of successive defense ministers and numerous high-ranking generals, points to a deep-seated crisis of trust between Xi and his

of whom were considered Xi loyalists, has created a climate of fear and uncertainty within the military, with one analyst noting, “No doubt there’s a lot of turbulence in the upper echelons right now” [1].

Rank / Name	Position(s)	Status
Gen. Li Shangfu	Defense Minister, CMC Member	Removed from office, expelled
Gen. Wei Fenghe	Former Defense Minister, CMC Member	Expelled from CCP
Gen. He Weidong	CMC Vice Chairman, Politburo Member	Disappeared from public view, investigation
Adm. Miao Hua	CMC Member, Director of Political Work Dept.	Suspended, then removed fror
Gen. Li Yuchao	Commander, PLA Rocket Force	Removed from office
Gen. Zhou Yaning	Former Commander, PLA Rocket Force	Removed from National People
Gen. Xu Zhongbo	Political Commissar, PLA Rocket Force	Removed from office

Table 1: Key Military Officials Purged Under Xi Jinping

The Disappearance of High-Profile Ministers

The power struggle has not been confined to the military. The abrupt and unexplained disappearances of two of Xi's handpicked ministers, Foreign Minister Qin Gang and Defense Minister Li Shangfu, have sent shockwaves through the international community. Both were considered rising stars within the CCP and their removal has raised serious questions about the stability and predictability of Xi's regime.

Qin Gang, who had been in his role for only six months, disappeared from public view in June 2023 and was officially removed a month later. The official explanation was a vague reference to "health issues," but widespread speculation points to a politically motivated removal, possibly due to an alleged extramarital affair that was used by Xi's rivals to undermine him [3]. Similarly, Li Shangfu's disappearance in August 2023, followed by his official removal in October, was attributed to corruption charges. The fact that both men were personally promoted by Xi has led some analysts to question Xi's judgment, while others see it as a demonstration that no one is safe from his anti-corruption campaign, regardless of their perceived loyalty.

Economic Policy at a Crossroads

The power struggle is also being fueled by deep divisions over the direction of China's economy. Xi Jinping has increasingly prioritized national security and state control over market-oriented reforms, a move that has been met with resistance from some senior officials who favor a more pragmatic approach to address the country's economic woes. China is currently grappling with a range of challenges, including a prolonged property sector crisis, weak consumer demand, and slowing export growth. An Atlantic Council report notes that “China’s prioritization of national security over economic growth has frozen most reform efforts” [4].

There are signs that Premier Li Qiang is being given a more prominent role in economic policymaking, leading to speculation that his influence is on the rise as Xi's may be declining. Li has represented China at several high-profile international summits that Xi has skipped, a departure from past practice. This has led some observers to decode hints that Xi may be under pressure to delegate some of his power [5].

International Perspectives and Implications

The internal power struggle in China is being closely watched by the international community, with significant implications for global security and economic stability. The purges in the military, particularly in the Rocket Force, have raised concerns about the PLA's readiness for a potential conflict over Taiwan. While CIA Director Bill Burns has stated that Xi has instructed the PLA to be “ready by 2027 to conduct a successful invasion” of Taiwan, the ongoing turmoil within the military casts doubt on its ability to carry out such a complex operation [6].

Analysts are divided on what the purges signify about Xi's grip on power. Some see it as a sign of weakness, suggesting that he is facing significant internal opposition and is being forced to take drastic measures to maintain control. Others argue that the purges are a demonstration of his strength, allowing him to eliminate any potential challengers and consolidate his authority. A Foreign Affairs analysis suggests that the current situation is creating a succession question that is “unsettling its present” and that a struggle over succession is “unlikely to stay inside China’s borders” [7].

Conclusion

The evidence strongly suggests that China is in the midst of a significant power struggle, characterized by a far-reaching anti-corruption campaign in the military, the removal of high-profile officials, and deep divisions over economic policy. While the ultimate outcome of this struggle remains uncertain, it is clear that it will have profound implications for China's future and its role in the world. The opaque nature of the CCP's decision-making

processes makes it difficult to predict the next turn of events, but the current turmoil indicates a period of heightened instability and uncertainty for China's political landscape.

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